



Consumption Control

Understanding the drivers behind the obesity crisis

Just last month Campbell Soup Co. announced that it will eliminate trans fats from its Pepperidge Farm Goldfish. Kellogg Canada included step counters in a limited number of Special K packages. And earlier this year Canada Bread launched a low-carb bread.

What's going on? Processors are reacting to trends they see in the market: consumers following the Atkins diet or who are just conscious of body weight. And in the midst of all these trends are the reports telling us an obesity epidemic is sweeping across North America – in spite of all the messages telling us to eat healthy and why. It's all this that spurred on a new study by In-Sync, a Toronto-based company that works with clients and their marketing departments to strengthen brands. The findings of the study, which is called

bulk. Yet there's pressure to conform to a body image ideal (think supermodels) of someone who "really doesn't consume a whole lot at all," says Faigelman.

In the second, *The Changing Rules of the Parent/Child Dynamic*, we know that nurturing children requires time and effort and often parents have a shortage of both. As a result, food has become a symbol of nurturing. "[Food] has started to take supremacy," says Faigelman. Parents have started to focus on food as a way to make up for the lack of nurturing they give their children.

The third area, *Self-Discipline Dilemma*, found that consumers all struggle with the food choices they make. It also found that people tend to judge the food choices others make.

While Faigelman and Casale couldn't release what they



When it comes to people's relationship with food, **at a deeper level the issue is control. Obesity may be the result of the struggle for control in our lives in a society that is obsessed with consumption.**

Obesity: A Fundamental Struggle for Control, are being presented in April to Canadian and U.S. sponsors of the study. The report is also for sale. Johanna Faigelman, a cultural anthropologist and leader of anthropology at In-Sync, and Ric Casale, a fellow director, found their food and beverage clients understood what the trends were, but they didn't "really feel they had a handle on what was driving them," says Faigelman.

From the work the anthropology team had already done, she explains, they knew that when it comes to people's relationship with food, at a deeper level the issue is control. Obesity may be the result of the struggle for control in our lives in a society that is obsessed with consumption.

The team took what they knew – the anthropology group has been around for six years – and looked at three areas. In the first, *Body Image Backlash*, they found that we live in a culture of consumption and abundance: rather than buy one chocolate bar, we can go into a Costco and buy them in

found, they did say that food processors can use the insights they've uncovered on consumers' needs to craft more effective ad campaigns, create new products and improve trade and customer communication. Casale adds that "over 90 per cent of our decisions are made at an intuitive level, and the data used by the human mind to reach those decisions reside below the level of conscious awareness – that's the power of our anthropological approach."

So rather than just launch low-carb foods or remove trans fats, even more opportunities lie in understanding consumers' struggle with control. "Think about the huge opportunities there are for clients if they understand that," says Faigelman. Processors could "capitalize on allowing people to feel they are gaining more control over their food choices and have their brands and new products and lines of business be connected to those positive feelings."

deanna.rosolen@food.rogers.com